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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 BAGHDAD 000003

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/IR, NEA/I, NEA/I-PM, DRL (ERICA BARKES  
RUGGLES),

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TAGS: PTER PHUM PINR PREF PREL IZ IR

SUBJECT: SECURITY TRANSITION FOR CAMP ASHRAF - ALL QUIET ON  
JANUARY 1

REF: BAGHDAD 4006

Classified By: Acting Political Military Minister Counselor Philip  
US. Kosnett for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) This is an action request. Please see para 12.

12. (C) SUMMARY. After receiving what Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK) leaders at Camp Ashraf described as "three blows" in the last week - a visit by Iraqi National Security Advisor (NSA) Dr. Mowaffak al-Rubaie, an Iraqi NSA press release on the visit (REFTEL), and a televised account of the meeting on Iraqi TV - MEK lawyers advised Camp Ashraf leadership not to meet with GOI representatives regarding the transfer of security responsibility for the Camp. Tripartite coordination meetings commenced only after a call from Pol-Mil MinCouns and a White House press statement reassured Camp Ashraf leadership that the GOI was serious about fulfilling humanitarian assurances the GOI had earlier provided the USG.

13. (C) SUMMARY CONTINUED: A visit to Camp Ashraf by Staff Major General (SMG) Alaa Salman Jassim December 27 apparently helped to move the transition process forward. During the meeting, Camp Ashraf leadership pressed its goals of receiving written assurances from the GOI, ascertaining whether the GOI is concerned with its obligations under international conventions on human rights, and learning whether the GOI considers the Camp Ashraf residents (CAR) terrorists. SMG Alaa noted his mission was to protect the CAR, and to complete his mission he would have to work with both the CAR and U.S. forces. The Minister of Human Rights will only conduct individual interviews after a suitable safe haven is designated for those that wish to leave the organization. Embassy requests that the Department coordinate the announcement of the termination of Protected Persons Status of the residents with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to help lessen political fallout. January 1 was marked with a small ceremony at Camp Ashraf symbolizing the transfer of security responsibility for the camp. Iraqi Army (IA), U.S. forces and CAR participated following a quiet first night. END SUMMARY.

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Televised Message from al-Rubaie  
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14. (SBU) After meeting with Camp Ashraf leadership December 20 and releasing a press release on the meeting December 21 (REFTEL), the NSA's office released a video account of the meeting to al-Iraqiyah television station, which broadcast it during the evening news program. The account was aired without coordination by Multinational Force - Iraq (MNF-I), the Embassy or the CAR. The clip showed al-Rubaie forcefully

notifying Camp Ashraf leadership that all CAR must leave Iraq, "to be deported to their countries or to a third country, as they wish" and that the camp would be closed down. Additionally, he asked the CAR "to make a pledge to stop all your media, cultural, intellectual, and political activities - with Iraqi politicians and Iraqi tribes. This violates Iraqi Law." The clip failed to show that al-Rubaie told the Camp Ashraf leadership that no one would be forced to return to their own country against their will.

**¶15. (S)** As a result of the airing of the video and coverage of the NSA's press release in the Arab and Persian press, Camp Ashraf leadership were advised by their lawyers not to meet QAshraf leadership were advised by their lawyers not to meet with GOI representatives regarding the security transition for the camp. The lawyers stated that the CAR being in a "non-legal" status would "pave the way for terrible statements and unilaterally serve the Iranian regime at the cost of Ashraf residents by people like Mowaffaq Rubaie." After a call by Pol-Mil MinCouns to Madame Mojgan Parsaie, the Chief Spokesperson for the CAR, reiterating the USG position, the publishing of White House Spokesman Benjamin Chang's statement to AFP December 23 noting that the USG had received written humane treatment assurances from the GOI, and an all-night meeting with many of the CAR, the Camp leadership decided to go ahead with tripartite security coordination meetings.

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First Tripartite Planning Meeting  
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**¶16. (S)** The first tripartite security transition planning

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meeting between Task Force-134 (TF134), 3/37/9 IA Battalion (BN), and MEK security forces was held December 24. Major topics of discussion included:

-- The MEK agreed to allow the IA to begin the formalization training at Grizzly Check Point (GCP) beginning December 25. (NOTE: GCP is the primary access point to enter Camp Ashraf. IA manning of the GCP had previously been declared a "red line" by the MEK. END NOTE.)

-- The MEK understood that the IA will be jointly manning GCP on January 1.

-- The IA Commander stated he will provide the same quality level of security and logistical support as the U.S. forces had.

-- The MEK designated a Liaison Officer to support the IA and will provide cell phone contact numbers.

-- IA BN Commander will provide a radio to the MEK which will further improve communication between the MEK and the IA.

-- MEK Commander Zohreh Akhiani requested that the IA not enter the city or provide internal security. (COMMENT: Per TF134, the IA has not agreed to this yet, but it will be a topic for future meetings. END COMMENT.)

-- Another meeting will be held to discuss logistics issues surrounding monthly logistics runs.

-- The IA will be directly coordinating with the CAR to support medical trips to Baghdad for several individuals that need advanced diagnostics.

-- Following the meeting, CAR took IA BN Commander COL Kareem and his assistant, CPT Ayad, on a tour of the city. The tour was without U.S. presence and was a good indication of an increased comfort level between the CAR and IA sides.

-- The next tripartite meeting is scheduled for December 29.

(COMMENT: This first meeting was valuable for the start of trust building between the IA and CAR. Although the CAR still have political issues with the GOI, they realize that the IA Commander is very interested in learning his mission and depends on the CAR for support. END COMMENT)

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December 27 Joint Policy Meeting  
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¶7. (S) Staff Major General (SMG) Alaa Salman Jassim, Ministry of Defense (MOD) Chief of Military Intelligence, traveled with Commanding General TF134, Pol-Mil MinCouns and staff to Camp Ashraf December 27 to continue discussions with Camp Ashraf leadership on the pending security transition for the camp. During a preparatory meeting with TF134 and EmbOffs, SMG Alaa noted the following points:

-- The GCP would be jointly manned by U.S. forces, IA forces, and CAR security guards for 30 days after January 1, after which U.S. forces would continue a monitoring role.

-- The perimeter towers that are currently manned by unarmed CAR security guards would either be jointly manned by IA and CAR or the IA forces would man the corner posts and the CAR the intermediary posts. He noted that, "We can work together for a solution."

-- SMG Alaa emphasized his desire "to make it clear to them that we are not here to harm them; we are here to protect them."

-- The IA forces will provide convoy security for logistics runs in Diyala Province, to Baghdad, or "even down to Basra, if needed."

-- The GOI has been in contact with the Iranian Government and the Iranians have "granted amnesty" to MEK members, with the exception of 54 that are wanted by the Iranian Government. He noted that the GOI would continue their QGovernment. He noted that the GOI would continue their dialogue, and "perhaps (the 54) will also be granted amnesty." The Iranian Government is prepared to issue new passports and citizenship status for those that wish to

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return, and are coordinating family visits. After discussion with the American side, SMG Alaa agreed to keep the topic of the day's meeting with the CAR leadership to security issues and that defer the subject of the Iranian offers to another day.

-- Regarding the presence of U.S. forces, he stated, "We won't let the Americans leave if we can't provide the same level of security. Even after the turnover, we need the Americans. We feel secure with the American forces. Enemies will think twice if both the IA and U.S. forces are here."

-- In response to a comment by MinCouns about the possibility of the Ministry of Interior bringing arrest warrants to the camp, SMG Alaa said, "There will be no arrest warrants."

-- Regarding the daily stream of workers and vendors that enter the camp (approximately 200-250), SMG Alaa noted that, "We won't be able to let them in without background checks." After discussion, SMG Alaa agreed that either the checks could be done prior to January 1, or that checks could be started after the people arrive at the camp; daily traffic would not necessarily be disrupted.

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SMG Alaa's Meeting with CAR Leadership  
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¶8. (S) SMG Alaa, CG TF134 and MinCouns then met with CAR

leadership to continue discussions on the security transition. Specific points made by SMG Alaa included:

-- Although political discussions continue between the GOI and the USG, IA elements will move in on January 1.

-- The CAR should notice much difference during the upcoming phase of the transition; the IA will be working with the U.S. forces.

-- MEK guards at the camp will remain guards.

-- The three parties will continue to work together until there is a conclusion to "the political issue."

-- After January 1, the IA will attempt to conduct background checks of all that enter the camp to keep out wanted persons, undesirables, those with criminal records, and terrorists.

-- Logistics procedures will remain as they are with IA providing security.

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CAR Leadership Response  
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19. (S) Madame Mojgan Parsaie, the Chief Spokesperson for the CAR, responded to SMG Alaa's opening remarks as follows:

-- The CAR received three "blows" (surprises) during the previous week: the visit by LTG Austin, CG MNF-I and NSA Dr. al-Rubaie and delegations; the NSA press release; and the video footage aired on al-Iraqiya TV.

-- She noted that the "blows" were softened by the public statements of humane treatment assurances by the White House and Department of State on December 23, after which she said, "The CAR are looking forward to a new era with their Iraqi brothers."

-- Although the USG has received written assurances from the GOI, the CAR have not. The CAR requested written assurances from the GOI. SMG Alaa said he would try to get written assurances to the leadership at their next meeting.

-- Madame Parsaie asked whether the GOI was concerned with international conventions and human rights guarantees as they apply to the CAR. SMG Alaa noted that the GOI is concerned with the human rights of each individual at Camp Ashraf.

-- She also asked whether the GOI considers the CAR terrorists. SMG Alaa replied that the GOI, by law, considers Qterrorists. SMG Alaa replied that the GOI, by law, considers the MEK a terrorist organization, but that they look at the individual residents as persons - not a terrorist group - in accordance with international standards.

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-- In response to a statement made by Dr. al-Rubaie that the GOI would expel the MEK from Iraq, SMG Alaa told Madame Parsaie, "We won't force you. We don't want the MEK organization, but based on your desire, we will facilitate your resettlement to any country in the world."

-- Madame Parsaie asked about the residents' status as refugees. She stated that the residents have "refugee status" and that since they had lived so long in Iraq, they thought they would have the right to remain. (NOTE: The previous week, Dr. al-Rubaie noted that the residents had no claim to asylee or resident status in Iraq. Their only choice would be to leave. END NOTE.) SMG Alaa responded that the GOI had never granted the CAR refugee status.

-- Madame Parsaie asked for Identification Cards that would declare their legal status in Iraq, such as "Political

Refugees."

-- In response to a question regarding movement outside of Camp Ashraf, i.e., to Baghdad, on water runs, and trips to religious shrines such as Najaf and Karbala, SMG Alaa noted, without being more specific, that the IA would provide security for logistical and medical movements by the CAR.

-- Because the MEK had turned over all weapons and was currently a "weapons free zone," Madame Parsaie asked that there remain no armed personnel in Camp Ashraf. (NOTE: All U.S. uniformed personnel present at the meeting were carrying weapons. END NOTE.) SMG Alaa did not respond to this request.

-- Regarding the observation towers, Madame Parsaie seemed receptive to the suggestion of jointly manned towers and the joint presence of both CAR and IA personnel at a liaison area, and suggested they could build additional towers outside of the present towers. (NOTE: It appears that Madame Parsaie may have been concerned with the movement within Camp Ashraf of IA forces. Additional towers outside the hard wire could be reached from the exterior of the camp. END NOTE.)

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U.S. / CAR Post-meeting Review  
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¶10. (S) As in previous engagements, the U.S. and CAR representatives met together in the absence of the GOI representatives. CG TF-134 and MinCouns noted that the IA appeared to have given a lot in response to CAR concerns. Madame Parsaie told the U.S. side that obtaining identification cards was extremely important and would alleviate a large portion of the residents' fears. She noted that identification cards would "be the first step in determining the residents' legal status in Iraq." To the question of providing names of visitors to the camp to the IA for vetting, she appeared to agree and said they would "work on it" and provide names to the IA.

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Termination of Protected Persons Status  
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¶11. (S) Madame Parsaie specifically addressed the "lifting" of Protected Persons Status for the CAR. Rather than insisting that Protected Persons Status must continue until at least 2011, which has been a mantra of the MEK and their supporters, she only asked that the act not be publicized. "It could create a crisis for us," she noted. MinCouns noted that it would probably at least have to be published and posted, to which she replied, "Our supporters are concerned and we don't want to increase tension." Qand we don't want to increase tension."

¶12. (S) ACTION REQUEST: While the Embassy concurs with CG MNF-I's recent request to SECDEF to announce the termination of the USG policy designating MEK personnel at Camp Ashraf "Protected Persons" under Article 4 of the Fourth Geneva Convention on or prior to January 1, we recommend that the Department closely coordinate with OSD for an appropriate announcement. While it is important to note that the USG can no longer provide "Protected Persons Status" to the CAR, wide publication of the announcement could provoke even more fervent demonstrations.

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Meeting with Minister of Human Rights  
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¶13. (S) MinCouns met with Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salem December 27 in Baghdad after returning from Camp Ashraf

to update the Minister on the situation at the camp. MinCouns stressed the need for the Ministry to conduct a GOI census of the CAR to determine the individuals' desires whether to voluntarily return to their home countries or be resettled in a third country. The Minister noted that there would not be a census until the GOI finds a safe haven for those who want to defect from the organization and she did not know when that would happen. She also noted that Dr. al-Rubaie had left the option for individual residents to request asylum or other legal status in Iraq. She opined that, as individuals, they should be given that option, even if the request may ultimately be rejected. She agreed to hold additional meetings with the U.S. side to discuss the system needed to classify the residents according to their desires.

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January 1 and All's Quiet  
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¶14. (C) The New Year came to Camp Ashraf quietly and without incident. A small ceremony to mark the transfer of security responsibility was held January 1 near the GCP with U.S. forces, IA forces, and CAR in attendance. Remarks made by a MEK representative were of reassurance and cooperation with the IA forces. The IA BN Commander reinforced his message that his mission is to keep the CAR safe and secure.

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COMMENT  
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¶15. (S) The positive mood of the CAR leadership during the December 27 meetings was a total reversal from the previous week during the visit of Dr. al-Rubaie and LTG Austin. Last week the leadership was visibly shocked, defiant and off message. The mood during the week had changed to pleasant, cooperative, and acquiescent. Topics previously considered "red lines" by the MEK, such as joint manning of GCP and guard towers and announcing the termination of Protected Persons Status, no longer seem insurmountable. Embassy and TF134 will closely monitor the situation at the camp as the new era of security responsibility for Camp Ashraf and the MEK in Iraq continues.

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